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A MEMORIAL EXHIBITION OF THE WORK OF HENRI GAUDIER-BRZESKA

Born 1891. Killed in Action 1915

WITH A PREFATORY NOTE BY
EZRA POUND

ERNEST BROWN & PHILLIPS
THE LEICESTER GALLERIES
LEICESTER SQUARE, LONDON
MAY—JUNE, 1918.

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THE SCULPTOR AT WORK

[Photo by W. Benington.

HENRI GAUDIER-BRZESKA.

FOR this preface to the Memorial Exhibition of Gaudier-Brzeska's work I can only recapitulate what I have already said in my Memoir of him. His death in action at Neuville St. Vaast is, to my mind, the gravest individual loss which the arts have sustained during the war. When I say this I am not forgetting that Remy de Gourmont, Henry James, and, lastly, Claude Debussy must all be counted among war losses, for in each case their lives were indubitably shortened by war-strain; but they, on the other hand, had nearly fulfilled their labour, each was still vigorously productive, but we could in fair measure gauge the quality of what they were likely to do.

Gaudier was at the beginning of his work. The sculpture here shown is but a few years' chiseling. He was killed at the age of twenty-four; his work stopped a year before that. The technical proficiency in the Stag drawings must be obvious to the most hurried observer. The volume and scope of the work is, for so young a man, wholly amazing, no less in variety than in the speed of development.

In brief, his sculptural career may be traced as follows: It begins with "representative" portrait

busts in plaster, and with work in more or less the manner of Rodin. Whatever one may think of Rodin, one must grant that he delivered us from the tradition of the Florentine Boy, and the back-parlour sculptural school favoured by the Luxembourg. Gaudier was quickly discontented with the vagueness and washiness of the Rodin decadence and the work of Rodin's lesser imitators. We next find him in search of a style, interested in Epstein, but much more restless and inquisitive. In "The Singer" we have what may seem an influence from archaic Greek, we have the crossed arms motif, used, however, very differently from the crossed or x'd arms of the splendid Moscophoros. (The anti-Hellenist cannot refrain from a slightly malicious chuckle on observing that the Greeks really had a great master (before Phidias), and that they have carefully forgotten his name. *Vide* also the consummate inanities in the Encyclopedia Britannica regarding the Moscophoros.) In the Singer we may observe also an elongation possibly ascribable to a temporary admiration of the Gothic.

In "The Embracers" we find a whole pot-pourri of forces: Egypt in the delicate flattening of the woman's right arm, Oceanic influence in the rest of it. Note that all great artists are imitative in their early work; their power lies in the rapidity with which they assimilate, digest, get through with, weld into a style of their own, the forces

and qualities of their models. Obvious as one or two acquired qualities are in "The Embracers," it is perhaps the most complete expression of Gaudier's personality that remains to us. It is also intensely original, the stylization into the bent prismatic shape of the whole does not, I think, occur elsewhere. He has shown the "sense of stone" in the utilisation of this queer-shaped block as Michaelangelo showed it in the economy of his "David" (a block, as you remember, which none of his contemporaries could handle, and which was regarded as spoiled, and useless).

Gaudier denied the Chinese influence in "Boy with a Coney," a piece more opulent in its curves than "The Embracers," though perhaps less striking at first sight, because of its greater placidity.

By the time he got to "The Dancer," Gaudier had worked definitely free from influence. This work is his own throughout. I can but call upon the unfamiliar spectator to consider what it means to have worked free of influence, to have established a personal style at the age of twenty-two. There is no minimising such achievement.

The personality is asserted in "The Embracers," the style is established and freed from derivativeness in "The Dancer." This last is almost a thesis of his ideas upon the use of pure form. We have the triangle and circle asserted, *labled* almost, upon the face and right breast. Into

these so-called "abstractions" life flows, the circle moves and elongates into the oval, it increases and takes volume in the sphere, or hemisphere of the breast. The triangle moves toward organism, it becomes a spherical triangle (the central life-form common to both Brzeska and Lewis). These two developed motifs work as themes in a fugue. We have the whole series of spherical triangles, as in the arm over the head, all combining and culminating in the great sweep of the back of the shoulders, as fine as any surface in all sculpture. The "abstract" or mathematical bareness of the triangle and circle are fully incarnate, made flesh, full of vitality and of energy. The whole form-series ends, passes into stasis with the circular base or platform.

I am not saying that every statue should be a complete thesis of principles. I simply point out the amazing fact that Gaudier should so clearly have known his own mind, that he should have been able to make so definite an assertion of his sculptural norm or main urges at the age of but two and twenty.

The quality of his stone animals, his sense of animal life seems too obvious to need note in this preface.

Because our form sense is so atrophied it is necessary to point it out, even to wrangle about it with unbelievers. Again Gaudier's technical power seems too obvious to need explanation,

MARBLE TORSO IN VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM, SOUTH KENSINGTON.

whether it be in cutting of brass, or in the little green charm, or in the splintery alabaster, or in the accomplished ease of the drawings.

If the "more modern pieces" puzzle the spectator there are various avenues of approach. First, by Gaudier's own manifestoes.

"*Sculptural feeling is the appreciation of masses in relation. Sculptural ability is the defining of these masses by planes.*

Secondly, by a study of Egyptian, Assyrian, African and Chinese sculpture, and a realisation that Hellenism, neo-Hellenism, neo-Renaissancism and Albert Memorialism do not contain and circumscribe all that it is possible to know on the subject. Only those shut in the blind alley which culminates in the Victorian period have failed to do justice to Gaudier. My praise of him is no longer regarded as an eccentricity.

He is irreplaceable. The great sculptor must combine two qualities: (*a*) the sense of form (of masses in relation); (*b*) tremendous physical activeness. The critic may know fine forms when he sees them embodied, he may even be able to construct fine combinations of form in his imagination. This does not make him a sculptor.

The painter may be able to record or set forth fine form-combinations, to "knock off" a masterpiece in four hours.

The sculptor must add to the power of imagining form-combination the physical energy required to

cut this into the unyielding medium. He must have vividness of perception, he must have this untiringness, he must, beyond that, be able to retain his main idea unwaveringly during the time (weeks or months) of the carving. This needs a peculiar equipment. Easily diverted, flittering quickness of mind is small use.

When a man has all these qualities, vividness of insight, poignancy, retentiveness, plus the energy, he has chance of making permanent sculpture. Gaudier had them, even to the superfluous abundance of forging his own chisels.

For the rest, *circumspice!* I can but record the profundity of the cry that came from the Belgian poet, Marcel Wyseur, on first seeing some work of Gaudier-Brzeska's: "Il a eu grand tort de mourir, cet homme! Il a eu grand tort de mourir."

EZRA POUND.

Catalogue

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No.

1. La Mendiante. *Early Work.*
Lent by T. Leman Hare, Esq.

2-7. Drawings.

8. Plaster cast of Torso in Victoria and Albert Museum, South Kensington.

9. Bas-relief. *Marble.* (1912-13.)
Lent by Miss Kinnear.

10. Drawings.

11. The Dancer. *Bronze.*
Lent by Sydney Schift, Esq.

12-13. Drawings.

14. Portrait. *Pastel.*

No.

IN GLASS CASE.

15. A Carving of a head in Stone.

16. A workman fallen from a scaffolding. *Early Work.*
Lent by Flight-Sergt. Wheeler.

17. Small Fawn. *Brown stone.* (1913.)
Lent by Ezra Pound, Esq.

18. A Torso. *Marble.*
Lent by Mrs. Shakespear.

19. A Serval. *Painted plaster.*
Lent by Lovat Fraser, Esq.

20. A Monkey. *Bronze.* (1912.)

21. Head of an idiot.
Lent by Alan Fraser, Esq.

22. A green stone charm. (1914.)
Lent by Ezra Pound, Esq.

23. A Toy. *Carved in brass.* (1914.)
Lent by Mrs. Kibblewhite.

24. A Fish. *Carved in brass.* (1914.)
Lent by Mrs. Kibblewhite.

THE SINGER.
(Carving in Stone.)

No.

25. The Madonna of "The Miracle." *Painted plaster cast.*
Lent by T. Leman Hare, Esq.

26. A Carving in Brass. (1914.)
Lent by Mrs. Kibblewhite.

27. A Letter weight. *Bronze.*

28. An Imp. *Alabaster.* (1914.)

28A. A Carving in bone (the handle of a tooth brush).
Lent by Mrs. R. P. Bevan.

29-30. Drawings.

31. The Russian ballet. *Bronze.*

32. Bulls. *Painting in oils.*

33. A Gorilla. *Plaster.* (1912.)
Lent by Major Haldane Macfall.

34. High-relief. *Alabaster against gilt background.* (1912.)
Lent by A. Kohnstam.

No.

35. Maternity. (1913.)
Lent by Roger Fry, Esq.

36. Pastel drawing.

37. Drawing.

38. Bas-relief. *Alabaster.* (1912.)

39. The Embracers. *Marble.* (1913.)
Lent by Ezra Pound, Esq.

40-42. Drawings.

43. Head of a man. *Stone.* (1912.)

44. Stags. *Alabaster.* (1914.)

45. A mask. *Painted plaster.* (1912.)
Lent by the Baroness D'Erlanger.

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56. Birds erect. *Stone.* (1914.)

57-59. Drawings.

60. Nude man and woman. *Marble Bas-relief.* (1913.)

61. Football player. *Bronze.* (1913.)

No.

62. A Pedlar. *Chalk drawing.*
Lent by Flight-Sergt. Wheeler.

62A. Still Life.

63. Drawing.

64. A portrait bust. *Plaster.* (1912.)
Lent by Major Haldane Macfall.

65. Self-portrait. *Pastel.*

66-67. Drawings.

68. Boy with a Coney. *Veined alabaster.* (1914.)
Lent by Ezra Pound, Esq.

69. Wrestlers. *Bas-relief plaster.* (1914.)

70-71. Drawings.

72. The Dancer. *Red Portland stone.* (1914.)

73. A portrait. *Pastel.*

74-75. Drawings.

76. A portrait bust. *Plaster.* (1912.)
Lent by Miss Enid Bagnold.

77-79. Drawings.

No.

80. Sleeping Woman. *Marble.* (1914.)

81-88. Drawings.

89. Sepulchral Monument.
Lent by A. Wolmark, Esq.

90-93. Drawings.

94. A little Fawn. *Stone.*
Lent by Mrs. Robert Mayor.

95. A sea bird. *Bronze.* (1914.)

96. A Fawn. *Bronze.* (1913.)

97. A bust of a military officer. *Bronze.* (1912.)
Lent by Major Raymond Smithies.

98. A Fawn. *Marble.* (1913.)
Lent by O. Raymond Drey, Esq.

99. Bas-relief: Nude. *Stone.* (1912.)

100. The Singer. *Stone.* (1913.)

101. Bust of Mlle. B. *Plaster.* (1914.)

102. A Tray. *Designed by H. Gaudier-Brzeska.*
Lent by C. R. W. Nevinson, Esq.

103. A Vase. *Plaster.*

THE FOX.
(Pen Drawing.)

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